

Running head: TEACHING READING THROUGH COMICS

The Implementation of Comic Books in a Foreign Language Environment Focusing on the
Reading Skill in Primary School Students

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Abstract

This classroom project evidences the results of the implementation of four main reading strategies: glossary, bilingual dictionary, transparent words, and key words to evidence the effect in the reading comprehension of 28 fifth-grade students in a public school in Pereira. The pre-service teachers guided students in the acquisition and use of these reading strategies during 10 English lessons through different reading comprehension activities in order to collect and analyze students' responses and students' linguistic outcomes via instruments such as students' artifacts, observations, and journals. The teachers designed the lessons and then they reflected on them. The results obtained from this implementation indicated that the strategies taught affected in a positive way students' performance in the reading comprehension activities as they were able to summarize the story and create their own comic using a basic plot structure. This all together impacted the students' reading comprehension strategies development and their rhetorical awareness.

Resumen

A través de este proyecto se evidencian los resultados de la implementación de cuatro estrategias de lectura: glosario, diccionario bilingüe, cognados, y palabras claves. Esto con el propósito de demostrar su efectividad en el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora de 28 estudiantes de grado quinto en un colegio público en Pereira. Las practicantes guiaron a los estudiantes en la desarrollo y uso de las estrategias de lectura mencionadas con anterioridad durante 10 clases de inglés, por medio de diferentes actividades que tenían como objetivo la comprensión lectora, y éstas a su vez fueron recolectadas para analizar a fondo la producción de los estudiantes. Partiendo del portafolio creado por cada estudiante, los practicantes fueron capaces de diseñar las clases acorde a la capacidad de los estudiantes, y reflexionar a partir de lo que funcionó o no dentro del salón de clases. Los resultados obtenidos en la implementación de este proyecto indicaron que las estrategias usadas por las practicantes tuvieron un impacto positivo en el desempeño de los estudiantes en las actividades de comprensión lectora, y en el momento de crear su propio cómic haciendo uso de una estructura narrativa. Finalmente, el resultado de ambas actividades tuvo un efecto positivo en el proceso de desarrollo de la habilidad lectora y conciencia retórica de los estudiantes.

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Introduction

This classroom project aimed at exploring into the implementation of comic books in a foreign language environment focusing on the reading skill in primary school students. The conceptual framework, literature review, methodology principles, and results explored all over during the implementation process are going to be presented and described thoroughly in this document. Firstly, the justification will contextualize the reader by supporting the reasons this classroom project was carried out. Then a theoretical framework will present the foundations in which the project was based by providing the definition of the main concepts. Finally, the literature review exposes two related cases that work as a background in using comics in an educational setting.

Furthermore, will describe the methods, where the implementations took place, which was the population involved, and the ethical considerations chosen to implement in this classroom project and why they were selected, the section of the methodology; which is divided in seven sub-categories, will explain in detail how the project was carried out. Then, the results from this classroom project are categorized into three main aspects: professional growth, students' responses and linguistic outcomes. The professional growth section includes classroom management, material design, and lesson planning. The students' responses and the linguistic outcomes sections includes the results obtained from the 10 implementations carried out. Besides, these results were obtained after the analysis process of students' products collected during the implementation. Finally, the conclusion for this classroom project is presented at the end of the paper.

1. Justification

The current project is aimed at exploring the learning phenomenon of teaching the receptive skill of reading through comic books in a second language environment for the development of the reading skill in primary public-school students. Chacón (2015) affirms that the inclusion on the teaching practice of reading from the early grades is a way of enriching the multimodal literacy that links reading linguistic elements with non-linguistic elements (Street, 1984, as cited in Chacón, 2015); this is supported by Mcvicker (2007) who illustrates that comics help learners to understand the intended meaning in an easier way, and at the same time it helps to develop reading strategies. The academic field accepted the value of comics in education in the early 1940's when Sones (1944) conducted a series of studies using comic books in education. Many of Sones' contemporaries carried out similar researches. For instance, Paul Witty led a study examining the reading content of comic books with 2500 school children (Sones, 1944).

During the following years, educators began designing comics-supported curriculum, gaining ground in the world of education. As an illustration, Versaci (2001), an English professor, challenged his students to critically examine the definition of literature by placing a comic book into the context of a classroom; leading students to become more engaged, since comics unlike traditional literature, are able to blend words and pictures so readers see the characters through the illustrations.

The Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN, 2014) designed a bilingualism program in order to fill the 21st century needs in relation to the learning of English as a second language. The current project is framed under the Colombia Bilingüe 2014-2018 Program of the Ministry of Education (MEN, 2014), which has set the goal of raising for 2018 students English level from

Basic A2 to Pre-Intermediate B1 level. To achieve this, MEN established 3 strategies: teacher training workshops, pedagogical model design, and use of support materials for English learning in grades 6 through 11. For teaching English in 4th and 5th primary grades, the MEN distributed the educational material "My ABC Inglés Kit" which was designed under the standards of Guide 22: Basic Standards of Competence in a Foreign Language: English (MEN, 2006).

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims at evaluating education systems worldwide by testing 15-year-old students in the core school subjects of reading, mathematics and science. The grade point average for the reading performance in countries which are PISA participants is 496 points. Although Colombia has shown an improvement in its reading performance of 3.0 points each year, increasing 385 points in 2006 to 403 points in 2012, the reading performance grade is still below the standard. In addition, another factor that reflects the low level of literary consumption in our country is illustrated in the cultural consumption survey carried out by the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) in 2014 which showed that Colombians only read 4.2 books per year.

Since in Colombia there is not an actual focus on the developing of the literacy and reading skills among young learners, and considering the under average performance of Colombian school children in the PISA test, the main intention of the current projects is to cultivate satisfaction in recreational reading on primary school students using comic books, since reading is a way to improve reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

The main contributions to the project are based on Cary (2004), who argues that comics provide different levels of complexity which varies from the easiest materials to the more

complex ones. With this in mind, the learners will get used to be constantly challenged as they will be in contact with comics of different complexity levels resulting in the achievement of a satisfactory reading process. Likewise, Tiemensma (2009) adds that the benefit of image-based storytelling is that it maintains learners' attention for longer time periods than only text formats. Moreover, The Australian National Enquiry Centre (NEC, 2005) states that it is important to teach the reading skill since it not only teaches phonetic, but also it integrates other abilities such as the acquisition of fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and the development of reading comprehension.

Other contribution taken into account, is the one proposed by Krashen (2003), who affirms based on the Pleasure Hypothesis, which declares that what is good for language development and literacy development is perceived to be pleasant by the acquirer and the teacher, free voluntary reading is a useful tool in the educational field. The main intention of the current projects is to cultivate satisfaction in recreational reading on primary school students using comic books as reading is a way to improve reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

2. Objectives

2.1 Learning Aim

To acquire some reading strategies that facilitates the reading comprehension process through comics.

2.2 Learning Objectives

To apply the reading strategies learnt during the reading stages

To design a personal comic with the correct plot structure.

2.3 Teaching Aim

To teach learners reading strategies through comics

2.4 Teaching Objectives

To assess the learners' application of the strategies acquired through reading comprehension tasks.

To collect the learners' final product and portfolios.

3. Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter is about the theoretical issues of matter for the present project. It pretends to explain in detail the concepts that will model the progress of this project. Along with the function of providing background that allows to understand fully the process of comic books into becoming an educational tool, and a visual embodiment of knowledge. In conjunction with mention of the particularities of teaching the reading skill to young learners, and the methods and strategies available for this purpose. The concept of comics will be discussed taking into account Waugh (1947), McCloud (1993), and Harvey (2010). Using comics in an educational setting will be analyzed through authors such as Mcvicker (2007), Duffy (2010), and Clydesdale (n.d.). Comics in teaching reading will be explored through contributions by Cary (2004), Tiemensma (2009) and Chacón (2015). Reading will be defined taking into consideration Shepherd and Unsworth-Mitchell (1997), Cziko, Greenleaf, Hurwitz and Schoenbach (2000), and Leipzig (2001). And finally, teaching reading to young children will be explained based on the National Enquiry Centre (NEC, 2005), The Early Childhood Forum (2005), and the theories of Krashen (2010).

3.1 Defining Comics

The word ‘comic’ comes from comedic newspaper strips pioneered by Outcault (as cited in Olson, 1898) in The Yellow Kid. However, no consensus has been reached on a definition of the comic medium. Waugh (1947) affirms that comics consist of a sequence of pictures that tell a story or joke, texts often in the form of speech balloons, and recurring characters. McCloud (1993) emphasizes the sequence of images that Waugh (1947) explained, and adds that the

purpose of a comic is to communicate something. A more complex definition is that “...comics consist of pictorial narratives or expositions in which words usually contribute to the meaning of the pictures and vice versa. A pictorial narrative uses a sequence of juxtaposed pictures” (Harvey, 2010, para.10). As the time passed by, the definition of comic book has evolved without changing its communicative purpose (humoristic and critic). Subsequently, after learning the definition of comic books, it is of great interest for the present project to illustrate the importance and advantages on the implementation of comics in an educational setting according to authors such as Mcvicker (2007), Duffy (2010), and Clydesdale (n.d.).

3.1.1 Comics in education.

Comics are an interactive instrument; Mcvicker (2007), states that comics are a visual aid for those learners who struggle with grasping the intended meaning of texts; along with being the perfect tool to foster and developing readers reading strategies using visual literacy skills. In a like manner, students can relate better to comics since comics are seen as outside of the imposed discourses of educational institutions, such as textbook and related course materials (Duffy, 2010). This statement is supported by Clydesdale (n.d.), who argues that learners will be more engaged with the language on a dynamic and authentic level; this means texts no designed for language students since these types of materials work as a bridge to scaffold into more complex texts. In the past years, comics were not considered as a reliable academic material; nevertheless, their use in academic purposes is becoming popular as authors had demonstrated their functionality in education for teaching multiple intelligences. For these reason, from the concept above, it is necessary to justify the use of comics in teaching reading seeing that reading is the skill of matter for the present project.

3.1.2 Comics in teaching reading

Cary (2004) illustrates the availability of comics for ESL learners, from beginners to intermediate and advanced levels, in which they vary in the amount of visual aids, vocabulary and grammar complexity. As a result, learners will be constantly challenging their critical literacy as well as expanding their lexicon. In addition, young learners experience a more satisfactory reading process when they are involved directly or indirectly in the stories through the visual aids. Besides, Tiemensma (2009) complements Cary's (2004) proposal by adding that image-based storytelling maintains learners' attention for longer time periods than only text formats considering that young readers feel involved in the story as they experience it visually and directly.

In addition to how young learners feel involved in the stories, Chacón (2015) affirms that the inclusion on the teaching practice of reading from the early grades does not imply to remove prominence to the written language or conventional literacy training. On the contrary, it is a way to enrich the multimodal literacy that links reading linguistic elements with non-linguistic elements; which emphasizes reading as a social practice and not exclusive to the field of education (Street, 1984, as cited in Chacón, 2015). In such a way, learning reading usually occurs in children from childhood; even prior to school and to learn the alphabetic code, children interact with images through drawings and television, approaching a reading of reality from their own experience. In order to enrich these authors' contributions, it is necessary to understand reading through authors such as Shepherd and Unsworth-Mitchell (1997), and others.

3.2 Interpreting Reading

According to Shepherd and Unsworth-Mitchell (1997), “reading may be defined as an individual's total inter-relationship with symbolic information. Reading is a communication process requiring a series of skills” (p. 1). Differing from Shepherd and Unsworth-Mitchell, Cziko et al. (2000), explain reading as a complex process of problem solving in which the reader aid from ideas, memories, and knowledge makes sense of a text. Leipzig (2001) agrees on reading as an elaborated process, and adds that this process involves word recognition, fluency and motivation. In that case, it becomes necessary to take into consideration how to approach the early stages of teaching reading to young children.

3.2.1 Teaching reading to young children

The Australian National Enquiry Centre (NEC, 2005) found that early, systematic and explicit teaching of phonics (the relationship between letters and sound) is a necessary part of an integrated approach to teaching reading. This approach teaches as well, the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in oral language (phonemic awareness), fluency, and vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, reading development must be woven into young children’s daily activities and should not be separated out from the learning that takes place through the play, work and discussion in an early year setting (The Early Childhood Forum, 2005, as cited in NEC, 2005).

Krashen (2010) acquires an opposing view by accepting the Goodman/Smith hypothesis, which claims that children learn to read by making sense of what is on the page, and the knowledge of phonemic awareness, phonics, and the ability to read lists of words in isolation is the result of learning to read by reading. Krashen affirms that the ‘learn to read by reading’ hypothesis is very similar to the Input Hypothesis, which claims learners acquire a language

when they obtain comprehensible input that results in language acquisition and the foundation for fluent language production (Krashen, 1981). According to this hypothesis, the acquirer needs to be in a low anxiety state for the input to be effective; similarly, Smith (as cited in Krashen, 2010) has consider that full development of literacy requires that the reader consider themselves a member of the literacy club.

3.2.2 Reading strategies

When teaching reading to children it is important to select a set of reading strategies in order to develop or to build reading comprehension. Block (1986) defines this concept as the way the learners perceive a task in the sense of what they can interpret from a text and the strategies they can used when a text is unclear. In the same line, Paris and Winograd (1990) illustrates that reading strategies relates to the capability of the learner to expand their knowledge in an autonomous way. Janzen (1996) adds that these strategies can be ranked from basic strategies such as guessing an unknown word from the context, to advanced strategies such as summarize a text. The procedures that will be implemented in the present project as a building comprehension strategy are presented as pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading.

3.2.2.1 Pre-reading

Pre-reading activities provide the reader with necessary background to organize an activity and to comprehend the material (i.e., building knowledge necessary for understand the content and structure of the text(s)); for this reason, Ringler and Weber (1984) call them enabling activities. According to Chastain (1988), the purpose of these activities is to motivate the students to want to read the assignment and to prepare them to be able to read it (e.g., words definition). Ajideh (2003) explain pre-reading tasks tended to focus on preparing the reader for linguistic,

cultural, and conceptual difficulties, among to activate existing schematic knowledge (i.e., making meaningful judgments about past events).

3.2.2.2 While-reading

In words of Hedge (2003), some teachers see while-reading activities as useless strategies. Therefore, there is a short amount of studies related to this reading strategy. However, the author also mentions that a considerable amount of the students reports the efficiency of while-reading strategies. Besides, Alyousef (2006) adds to the efficiency of while-reading tasks, the way the students improve how they engage with texts while developing their linguistic knowledge. In order to apply this reading stage, Saricoban (2002) recommends the readers to have in mind questions that guide them through the text. (i.e., what is the function of this text? how is the text organized or developed? etc.).

3.2.2.3 Post-reading

Haller (2000) designed a set of school school-based post-reading tasks that will boost the learning comprehension. The author proposes activities such as matching exercises, cut-up sentences, and comprehension questions. Saricoban (2002) explains that teachers may found an opportunity for post-reading work if after asking themselves the following questions the answer to any of them is a yes: Do the learners know of a similar situation to that presented in the text? Does the text present a situation that calls for recommendations? Does the text present a situation that invites completion? Do the text present views that might need to be counter-balanced? The work any of these questions lead may be writing, interaction, drawing a diagram, or any combination of these. According to Varaprasad (as cited in Saricoban, 2002), students can also be asked to evaluate, to synthesize, to comment, or to reflect upon what they have read in that

lesson. Saricoban (2002) clarify that sometimes the post-reading work may not be suitable; however, these strategies (e.g., summarizing, evaluating, synthesizing, commenting, and reflecting) will help students to consolidate their interpretation derived from their interaction with the text(s).

In conclusion, the contributions by the different authors will be explored in the present project considering the importance of deeply knowing the concepts of matter, which verges into taking full advantage of the visual aids tools that comic books provide. As Norton (2003) argues, the use of comics boosts the engagement of the learners with the classes. In addition, when teaching reading while using building comprehension strategies -which is the essence of this project- it is important to look for specific procedures (i.e., pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading) that facilitates a significant improvement in the reading skill among the students.

4. Literature Review

The main aim of our literature review is to present multiple sources which support our belief that comic books can be a valuable teaching aid. Authors such as Ranker (2007) and Afrilyasanti & Basthomi (2011), who agree that this image-based storytelling (comic books) is a powerful educational tool, and a great visual representation of knowledge. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the advantages on the implementation of comics in the classroom, mainly for teaching English as a second language. Another purpose, is to point out the ability of English language learners to develop critical skills through comics.

First, we describe a related study carried out by Ranker (2007), who concluded that when teaching a second language it is important to use highly visual texts material that motivates the students to learn and to be engaged with the classes. The use of popular media; such as comics and graphic novels, television, radio, and mass media in general, helps students to acquire analytical tools necessary for the developing of critical thinking, such as non-verbal cues which are an important tool to develop the reading skill on learners. Additionally to the importance of using highly-visual material, a study conducted by Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011) concluded that learners supported the lessons by being actively involved in the classroom discussion and other activities proposed that develop students' writing skill and creativity.

On a first instance, a study carried out by Ranker (2007) investigated the efficacy of reading out loud comic books in the classroom; using comic books to teach lessons about how text helps young English-language learners with reading and writing. Since recently, researchers have dedicated more time to prove that popular media such as comic books can be used to teach English as a second language (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Marsh & Millard, 2000).

The main question that interested Ranker was how to implement a reading/writing workshop with second/additional-language learners. How this facilitates learning about story structure, taking a critical reading stance, and reading textual features of dialogue. As well as, how students can include this features in their own writing during the composition period that followed on class.

Ranker conducted a study in a first-grade ELL classroom. The students in Ms. Stephens' class were bilingual, speaking Spanish as their first language (except for one student, who came to the classroom from Somalia, late in the school year). Most of the students' families had originated in Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic or Guatemala.

The author's method was observation, from November to June of an academic year. Professor Ranker visited the class one or two days each week during the morning literacy workshop (which lasted approximately two and a half hours). Ranker developed a case study of the teachers' classroom, gathering several types of data using qualitative research principles and procedures (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is using methods such as participant observation or case studies which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011).

Ranker (2007) reports that the teacher carried out a series of activities that involved reading out loud a comic in which the students' task was to identify a problem, and how that problem was solved. Before reading out loud, the teacher explains to the learners how they can identify a problem and the solution in order to activate students' background knowledge, and to create a reference point in the lesson.

At the end of the observation, Ranker mentions that it is evident (through sighs and cheers) that these fictional figures immediately caught students' attention. Students took up elements of the lessons and the genre study on comics more broadly by creating stories of their own. In this way, the read aloud served as a starting line for the students, calling to mind familiar subjects that matter, and that they could explore in their own writing. These reading lessons had multiple possible benefits for the students, they used subject matter about which students had detailed knowledge and which they could use to work with print during the extended composing periods of the workshop.

The author recommended that before applying this approach, the comics must be analyzed regarding the lesson we are going to teach. Moreover, since students may be unable to separate fiction from real violence teachers must show the students the difference between both types of violence through the development of critical thinking. In addition to all the foregoing, it is important to keep in mind we need to choose a comic that supports the lesson, and its content appropriate for learners' age.

The main gap we found that support our ideas of using comic books to teach English to young learners, is that they are highly visual texts, and according to Liu (2004), these type of material is especially effective for increasing reading comprehension for L2 learners, considering that to develop the comprehension skill on learners, non-verbal cues are a significant tool. In this way, making classes interesting and motivating in the use of the material to engage learners in various aspects of the main skills, as well as, the cognitive develop and the learning of a new literacy practices. However, a major gap we found in the method implemented in the sessions observed by Ranker (2007), was lack of building comprehension strategies. For this reason, the

main focus for the present study is on the activities proposed Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011) in relation to teaching reading.

Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011) explore the ability of English language learners to obtain communication and critical skills through using multiple communication technologies such as cartoons and comics. Wagner (2006) pointed that to guarantee 21st century learners' progress, it is important to innovate the learning environment, and to provide lessons that are meaningful and relevant in order to achieve 21st century tasks. This means learners have to be equipped with the ability of understanding multicultural literacy, global awareness, risk taking, personal and social responsibility, and ability in producing significant products.

Furthermore, according to the authors, in Indonesia is still prevalent a conventional teaching and learning process; thus, making learners less eager to participate (Afrilyasanti and Basthomi, 2011). Building on previous research which has paid attention to English teaching in Indonesia and the benefits of cartoons and comics as an alternative teaching media explained, the main objectives of the research were describing the sample of materials, the activities employed, and the implementation of cartoons and comics in enabling EFL students to be 21st century learners.

Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011) conducted a descriptive qualitative study, which involved the application of comics and cartoons in an EFL setting. The researchers worked with students of grade X7 of Sekolah Menengah Atas (Senior High School) Negeri 8 Malang, Indonesia. The total students engaged were 37 students of class X7 and 39 students of class X8. The collecting of the data involved recording students' participations and score, along with students' portfolio. The authors set a series of activities similar to Barker's (2009), which

enhance students' ability to keep interested and motivated in the lessons by making them interactive while developing their cartooning skills. These activities were described into pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching; through the use of currently relevant materials as a guideline for lessons.

Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011) concluded that learners supported more the lessons by participating, since they were involved actively in the classroom discussion and other activities proposed that develop students' writing skill, completeness, and creativity. According to Rodgers. et. al. (2006), 21st century learners are good at reading visual images, have strong visual-spatial skills, tend toward parallel processing and inductive discovery, look for fast response times which leads to short attention spans.

Images support the experience of reading. Consequently, the previous research papers are relevant for the present project for the reason that, as Ranker (2007) suggested, comics are judged to be appropriate, since learners are easily engaged in the lessons. In addition, the materials used during the sessions must be adapted to the learners' needs and context with the intention of make them more accessible and reliable in the pursuit of the development of the reading skill in young learners. In this sense, in order to teach reading it is necessary to adapt a singular methodology similar to the activities recommended by Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011), in pursuance of building reading comprehension through pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading strategies that aid learners to practice various comprehension skills with structure and support.

5. Methodology

The following section contains the main elements involved in the development of the current project. Beginning with context and setting, it involves the target population and the description of the participants. Followed by, the design structured by the Backwards Method and the PPP approach. Besides, it covers the development and implementation that contains detailed information about the theory and impact of the project. Next, it describes the resources used for the implementation. Furthermore, it explains the assessment procedure which evidences the expected results and learners' linguistic outcomes based on the implementation. Finally, it explores the instruments and reflection for the report of the present project built on the data collected in the sessions.

5.1 Context and Setting

The present project was implemented in the city of Pereira, in the Institución Educativa Jesús de la Buena Esperanza for the development of the classroom project of the Licenciatura en Bilingüismo Program. The institution offers primary education in the afternoon, and secondary in the morning schedule, and their strata varies between one and three.

Institución Educativa Jesús de la Buena Esperanza is the public school in which the present project will be carried out. Currently, this institution English program is being oriented by the standards of Guide 22: Basic Standards of Competence in a Foreign Language: English (MEN, 2006), which are the Ministerio de Educación Nacional guided standards for teaching English in Colombia. According to Guide 22: El Reto, students between first and fifth grade are located in a proficiency level of A1 and A2. In addition, each of teachers in charge of the primary

groups' is in control of the English teaching, in two hours per week intensity. The number of students in the grade in which we implemented the present project is 30.

5.2 Participants

This project involved two types of participants: the students, who are in fifth grade from the Institución Educativa Jesús de la Buena Esperanza; and the practitioners, which are the students from the Licenciatura en Bilingüismo program of the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, and who are the ones that carried out this classroom project.

5.2.1 Students

The current project was implemented among primary students from fifth grade, ages ranging between 10 and 12 years old. As Piaget (1927) argues, between these ages the students are particularly recognized in the Concrete Operational stage; which is characterized by, the improvement of the language, the development of the memory and imagination, and the systematic manipulation of symbols (logical thinking). The egocentric thinking starts to diminish in the Concrete Operational Stage. Knowing the abilities and limitations of a certain age group helps to structure the content of a lesson for maximum effectiveness. Elementary kids can be described as active, verbal, enjoy humor and group activities (e.g., non-sedentary ones, such as sports, etc.)

5.2.2 Practitioners

In order to implement the current project, the two teachers orienting this course, exchanged roles with intervals of one day per week for one hour and half of practice. As a result, one of the teachers carried out the classes, and the other carried out the observation of the class. All the information collected through the observations was systematized in a journal, facilitating

the process of analysis and reflection about learners' outcomes. The designing of and material was in charge of both teachers.

5.3 Design

This classroom project was framed under the Backward Design approach suggested by Richards (2013) and the implementation of the PPP methodology (presentation-practice-production) proposed by Tomlinson (as cited by Richards, 2013). First, Richards (2013) proposes different curriculum approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central and Backward Design. Nevertheless, the approach that was used for the current project is the Backward Design, which is a method that implies defining the expected results or outcomes before designing the materials, or planning the lessons. Moreover, these outcomes are set based on the Guide 22: El Reto at the beginning of the project. Taba (as cited by Richards, 2013) illustrated the steps to follow in order to apply the Backward approach: diagnosis of needs, formulation of objectives, selection of content, organization of content, selection of learning experiences, organization of learning experiences, and determination of what to evaluate and of the ways of doing it.

A clear representation of Backward Design is Guide 22: Basic Standards of Competence in a Foreign Language: English. Based on the outcomes proposed in Guide 22: El Reto, the current project aimed to develop the reading skill in Primary school children. The expected result was to teach and motivate free reading among children in their target language (i.e., English).

This project was framed under the implementation of the teaching method called Presentation, Practice and Production methodology, or simply PPP, defined as "an approach to teaching language items which follows a sequence of presentation of the item, practice of the item and then production (i.e. use) of the item" (Tomlinson, 2011, pp.15, as cited in Criado,

2013). These approaches and methodology was implemented in the present project since PPP is a method for teaching structures (e.g. reading, grammar, vocabulary, etc.) in a foreign language; and every lesson has a language aim according to the Backward Approach, which learners should fulfill by the end of it. The practitioners presented the English language through comics and then gave learners the opportunity to practice it through controlled tasks. In the final sessions, learners practiced the target language in free voluntary reading activities and the designing of their own comics.

5.4 Development and Instructional Design

This classroom project aimed at developing reading strategies in a primary group from first to fifth grade. The present project will keep the definition of comics provided by Harvey (2010), and the definition of reading given by Leipzig (2001). Harvey (2010), defines comics as pictorial narratives that used a sequence of juxtaposed pictures. Moreover, according to Leipzig (2001), reading is an elaborated process that involves word recognition, fluency, and motivation. According to Cary (2004), the use of comics in the classroom challenge the learners' critical literacy and expand their lexicon. Moreover, Chacón (2015) illustrates that using comics in the classroom it is a mean to boost the multimodal literacy that links reading linguistics elements with non-linguistic elements. For this purpose, it is necessary to adapt the material; such as, the chapter one from Adventure Time – Marceline Gone Adrift comic, which was implemented over 10 sessions, one per week of one hour and a half each.

During the first session, a diagnosis activity was implemented in order to know learners' proficiency level. The results of this activity reflected that the learners' English level was not aligned to the language standards proposed with the MEN (2006). Bearing in mind these results,

the following lessons were planned around the standards proposed by the MEN (2006) Guía 22, which were designed for first to third graders.

Following the PPP methodology proposed by Tomlinson (as cited by Richards, 2013), the sessions consisted of three main stages. At the beginning of the session a warm up was carried out with the purpose of lowering students' affective factors that may interfere with the reception and processing of the input. This stage was followed by the presentation, in which the content related to the creation of a comic (different parts of a narrative, physical, and personality adjectives, and creating an outline), and strategies were introduced (such as using of a bilingual dictionary, key words, recognizing transparent words and false cognates, inference, skimming and scanning, making predictions, creating a glossary, and using imagery). On the next stage, students read while applying the strategies given on the previous stage through worksheets with multiple choice questions, matching, and filling the gaps activities, as well as summarizing what they read. Finally, on the last stage students worked on the production of their own narrative in the form of a comic book.

5.5 Resources

Resources are the means we use to achieve the project objective of teaching reading to young learners through the use of comics. The primary resource for the implementation of the present projects is the comic book *Marceline Gone Adrift*, which is a mini-series of six issues in the Adventure Time universe published in 2015.

5.6 Assessment Procedure

According to the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME, n.d.), assessment “is a tool or method of obtaining information from tests or other sources about the achievement

or abilities of individuals” (para. 18). The ultimate purpose of all assessment in early childhood programs is to support growth, learning, and development of young children. However, a coherent systems of assessment must address the following purposes: to identify potential problems in development (screening); to inform, support, and monitor learning (instructional); to diagnose strengths and areas of need to support development, instruction, and/or behavior (diagnostic); and to evaluate programs and provide accountability data on program outcomes for the purpose of program improvement (program evaluation) (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2008).

Research provides evidence that strong early literacy education can lead to better outcomes later on (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller, 2002). The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL, 2004 as cited in Wren, 2002) created The Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read: A Framework. This framework describes the various cognitive domains that research has shown to be necessary for reading acquisition; such as, reading comprehension, decoding, and language comprehension.

Wren’s (2002) perspective of this framework consist in that in reading comprehension assessment children must be asked to answer inferential questions about information which was implied by the text, to retell the story in their own words, to summarize the main idea or the moral of the story, to fill in the blanks with appropriate words, or by asking them to read and follow simple instructions. The author mentions that language comprehension can be assessed in the same way reading comprehension is assessed. An example of an assessment of decoding skills is to present students with isolated words that are within their spoken vocabulary and ask them to read each word aloud; another example is to match a spoken word with a written word.

Having in mind the type of assessment that will be applied in the current project, in order to design and adapt the materials such as the comics, worksheets, etc., the practitioners will take into account Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) cognitive process domain that involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. Moreover, this domain includes six major categories of cognitive domain starting from the simplest to the most complex: Remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

For the present project, a student's portfolio will be used as an assessment tool to document students' learning through collections of learners' work and related material that depicts their activities, accomplishments, and achievement, such as the designing of their own comics. According to Venn (2000) process portfolios are ideal for documenting the stages that students go through as they learn and progress.

5.6.1 Instruments and reflection

According to Annum (2016) instruments are valid and reliable tools for data collection. The instruments that will be used in the present project as artifacts for collecting students' linguistic outcomes are tasks, worksheets, portfolio and observation, while the tools for registering the experiences of the teachers' professional development or growth are observation and journals.

5.6.1.1 Students linguistic outcomes

5.6.1.1.1 Artifacts

Los Angeles Trade-Technical College (LATTC, n.d.) define artifact as a student product or performance used for assessment, for the current project the use of tasks, worksheets and a

process portfolio were be the main assessment artifacts used for gathering data about learners' linguistic process and outcomes.

5.6.2 Observations

Taylor-Powell and Steele (1996), explain observation as an essential tool used in order to gather useful information about learners' improvement throughout the lessons, and vice versa. The mean of accomplishing this end is by conducting descriptive observations of classroom interactions that relates the learners' reactions and behaviors towards the comics, the different materials presented, and the tasks and activities guided by the teachers.

5.6.3 Teachers professional development or growth

5.6.3.1 Observation

Martin (1977) describes classroom observations instruments as “organized, objective systems for observing, coding, arranging, and analyzing the behaviors emitted by teachers and students engaged in instructional exchanges” (p. 43). Hence, helping the observers registering the experience through objective empirical realities of the classroom and specific relevant behaviors.

5.6.3.2 Journals

The tool used by observers to record those events that are likely to be interpreted in this project is a field journal. The function of the observer's notes is that they are “the vehicle for ordered creativity” (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, p. 105). Hence, this tool will allow systematizing experiences and then reflect upon the learning and teaching objectives. Each practitioner will keep their own record of events divided into two columns. In this way, each observer will include on one side the observations made and on the other their conclusions. After

each session, both practitioners will meet to share and discuss ideas that can be geared to the project.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

This chapter attempts to discuss the ethical considerations that influenced the development of the present project. As Lankshear and Knobel (2004) remind us, within educational research, ethical issues arise when ensuring that the interests and well being of people will not be harmed during the realization of a project; particularly children as vulnerable members of society. In response to issues that may emerge during the implementation, four ethical principles will be covered; including obtaining informed consent, avoiding deception, issues of anonymity, and reciprocity that can help to balance the unequal power balance between researcher and researched.

5.7.1 Obtain informed consent

As it is expected from researchers to collect information and monitor the students' learning process, participants must be aware of the aims of the current project, and what it involves. This information will be taken into account for the current project in the sense that the target population are children as participants, making appropriate for parents, or guardians to be informed of the role of the subjects in the project and to provide informed consent on their behalf. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) recommend two types of statement for seeking consent, which must be written in a language accessible to the signatories, in this case Spanish. The first one, an information letter that explains the aims of the project, the possible risks that may involve if any, and the guarantees on the safety of the participants (Appendix A.). The second, a consent form signed by the subjects or their guardians (Appendix B.).

5.7.2 Avoid deception

As a part of obtaining consent, avoiding deception is an ethical principle that involves explaining to the learners what the project will imply. As a result, the students consent their participation in the project. As Lankshear and Knobel (2004) states, betraying the learners trust may damage the rapport between researchers and learners. Moreover, the authors mention two types of deception that must be avoided. The first one is to hide the whole purpose of the project to the students. The second, is to make the learners think that they will be co-conspirators instead of the subjects of the project. This ethical principle is related to our project since it requires to have the absolute consent not only from the parents/caregivers, but from the learners. They need to know their role in the project, and what it involves in order to avoid affecting the relationship and confidence between practitioner-learner, and the implementation of the project.

5.7.3 Ensure confidentiality and anonymity

The authors stress that a traditional criterion of ethics is to assure to the participants their identities will not be reveal. As Price (1996) affirms it is better to “compromise the research rather than compromise the participants” (p. 207), which includes protecting anonymity. Aiming to minimize any negative repercussions for subjects who participate in this project, the participants’ identity will not be revealed. Since the main corpora of observational data collected for this study are tasks, worksheets, portfolio, observation, and journals; any details that could make a setting or participant identifiable will not be given. This more transparent approach to data collection and analysis will helps to overcome participant concerns and to reinforce the trusting, cooperative relations that are essential for the success of this project.

5.7.4 Reciprocate

Ethical research means making sure the project benefits the participants and not just the researcher. Honoring the contribution of participants, the application of reciprocity in the present project is aimed at alleviating in-practice reading levels and reading comprehension issues in children. Furthermore, generate awareness at a local level. This means, involving the subjects in the interpretation of the data collected and sharing the project results with the institution.

6. Results

6.1 Professional Growth

In this section, the results regarding professional growth will be explored. These findings, were categorized into three sections (classroom management, material design, and lesson planning), which aim at reflecting upon specific items involved in the professional development of this project's authors. Each finding will be described and supported with evidence which provided the practitioners with insights and input for the improvement of teaching skills.

6.1.1 Classroom management

6.1.1.1 Strengths

Create and maintain appropriate behavior of students in classroom settings has always been a concern for teachers. The aim of implementing classroom management is to enhance respectful behaviors in an academic environment and improve students' participation (Emmer and Sabornie, 2015; Everston and Weinstein, 2006). Throughout the implementation of this classroom project, the use of different strategies has been applied with the purpose of managing students' behavior. During the first implementations, we taught students different patterns that worked as attention grabbers; this drilling patterns were effective since it diminishes negative behaviors and raises time spent academically engaged.

For instance, teachers taught students that every time they heard "Los que me estén escuchando que aplaudan (dos) veces...", they had to complete the action and clap the times teacher instructed; this motion and sound grabbed students' attention gradually until the whole class was engaged. Another attention grabber was the drilling "Okay Okay, Alright Alright" in which the teacher uttered "Okay Okay" and the learners were supposed to answer "Alright

Alright”. After implementing these attention grabbers, students knew the implications of doing them in the learning environment.

According to Blair, DeRoos, and Kraeothwill (2010), it is important to use effective classroom management strategies as they promote positive outcomes for learners. Classroom management has contributed to our professional growth in the sense that knowing and implementing these strategies enrich our teaching repertoire.

6.1.1.2 Challenges

Teachers encounter many challenges in the classroom. In Colombia, one of the most common challenges teachers face every day is the number of students per classroom. The MEN determined by decree (D3020; 2002) that the maximum number of students per classroom were 40 in primary. Since the aim in an EFL classroom is to develop students’ communicative skill, there must be opportunities for individual feedback, monitored practice and frequent and meaningful teacher-student interaction. Accordingly, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2010) recommends no more than 15 students per class. However, in the real scenario we encountered 30 students, which sometimes was one of the factors leading to disruptive behavior associated with pair and group work. Being such a large group, meant students were divided into sub-groups making it difficult to socialize and coexist between all. This issue lead to conflict between team members, and was evidenced in one of the observations, in which the practitioner wrote:

...they [students] struggled with choosing partners after teacher asked them to work in pairs. Students started discussing animatedly their paring preferences, increasing noise levels and leading to distractions. Since it is very difficult for them to form pairs, in-service teacher

intervened guided by his knowledge about class member dynamics, and lead the pairing activity by calling aloud the names of some students and asking them to choose their partner.

For this reason, we decided to implement the attention getters of clapping and chanting after the teacher prompt, already mentioned in the strengths section of this segment. As well as, the use of a new grouping strategy, in which every class different students were named ‘captain’ of their respective work team. This strategy, aimed at the creation of positive group experiences that have been shown to contribute to student learning, retention and overall academic success (Astin, 1997; Tinto, 1998; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006).

Although the attention getters and the grouping strategy that were implemented worked satisfactorily, it would have been better to implement more of these preventive disruptive-behavior actions in the classroom in order to have variety through the sessions. We discovered that implementing project-based tasks and pair-and-share strategies were a key factor to maintain students engaged to the lesson.

6.1.2 Material design

6.1.2.1 Strengths

Designing material that engage students in the lesson is one of the most important aspects when planning a lesson. Using comics to teach reading to young children was as strength since this type of material engage the learners. As Cary (2004) states, the visual aids help learners to be more engaged with the process of reading, and facilitates its understanding. Vibrant colors such as pink, purple, and blue were the main color scheme on the first chapter of the comic. The text was always accompanied by images in which the characters performed the actions being

described in the text (Appendix C). Moreover, this type of material can be applied to beginners and advanced students.

Throughout the implementations we observed that students enjoyed reading. This was evidenced during the implementations as students got really excited about the material. Every session students were curious about what was going to happen next on the comic, so they constantly were asking to see the original comic; which was the complete version from the comic they were reading. As documented in one of the practitioner's observations, one student asked during the second session to go through the whole first chapter "¿Teacher, me deja ver el comic? Yo ya terminé." Following, the student had the attention of a small audience which were also curious about the comic. In her observation, the practitioner wrote, "...there is a group of 6 students around the first student who asked to see the comic, who are also trying to read it." Moreover, by the end of the implementations, all of them asked for a copy of the comic. The practitioner also mentions in her last observation "Teacher is giving the complete versions of the comic that we used as material through the sessions, most of the students are asking for a copy willingly."

To conclude, using comics to teach reading has contributed to our professional growth in the sense that it revealed its positive impact among learners since this type of material engage and motivate them towards the lesson. Moreover, it develops their interest in the English language, as well as it creates a more relaxed learning environment while using reading material they enjoy.

6.1.2.2 Challenges

Teaching reading through comics involve challenges. The biggest challenge we found was students' proficiency level. According to the Guide 22: Basic Standards of Competence in a

Foreign Language: English (MEN, 2006), students from fifth grade must manage an A2 (basic) level proficiency. With this information in mind, we decided to select material according to these standards; nonetheless, the public schools in Colombia deal with a different reality. We encountered that the students had a reduced knowledge of the language, so they had to look for the meaning of almost each word. For this reason, we decided to divide the first chapter of the comic into three sections so we could introduce them to this type of material gradually. In this way, avoiding that students feel overwhelmed from the amount of visual stimulus that this type of content leads to. This was a challenge as we had to teach them how to take advantage of the visual support that comics provide. Additionally, we decided to implement reading strategies related to vocabulary such as creating a glossary and the use of the dictionary. These strategies seemed to work as students demonstrated their reading comprehension through the summaries they made.

Giving the fact that the present project is based in the PPP methodology, during the pre-reading stage students were introduced the vocabulary and patterns they would find in the section of the comic the class was focused on. This scaffolding process went hand on hand with the process of acquiring the reading strategies since in this practice stage students applied the reading strategy presented at the beginning of the class while using the vocabulary and patterns learnt to make sense of the text they have been reading. This was corroborated in the production stage through reading comprehension questionnaires (Appendix D) and students' summaries (Appendix E). In one of the summaries, a student wrote:

Dulce Princesa está en su laboratorio y luego Mentita, Marceline necesitaba ayuda pero Mentita le llevó un sándwich, la Dulce Princesa empezó a comer y escucharon como una alarma arriba, subieron y encontraron a Marcceline en un rayo.

Another during the same activity wrote:

Mentita llega al laboratorio de la Princesa, y la Princesa se enoja que por qué se mete sin permiso en las cosas de ella entonces Mentita le dice perdón no quería interrumpirte y la Princesa le dice bueno tranquilo no pasa nada...

As Mcvicker (2007) argues, comics provide a visual help to those learners that may struggle with reading comprehension. Through the implementations, this challenge helped us to discover that although there was not production in the target language, students demonstrated they understood the story plot through the different tasks and activities proposed by the practitioners. An example of this, can be found in one of the summaries: "...despues Mentita le dijo a la Princesa Careful princess...." (Appendix E), which demonstrates that students were contextualizing the dialogues with the events of the story.

6.1.3 Lesson planning

6.1.3.1 Strengths

As Harmer (2011) states, the majority of teachers reflect on what they are going to do in a lesson before they actually do it, including aspects like the purpose of the lesson, learners' needs, resources availability, time, anticipated problems and solutions, procedures, etc. The classes guided during this classroom project were not the exception since as facilitators, we had a lesson plan that guided us through the development of each session. The lessons were planned during two hours weekly sessions; likewise, at the end of each session we discussed the aspects of the

class that were accomplished satisfactorily, and its particular challenges. (Appendix F). This allowed us to reflect upon what went well and what challenges we encountered, and plan the next class from these reflections. For instance, practitioners noted on the comments section on the lesson plan number three the following: “For this class, Ss [students] didn’t bring the copy of the comic.” (Appendix G). Having in mind the comment from lesson number three, the practitioners addressed this issue in the journal: “... since in today’s session students didn’t bring the copy of the comic, we must collect the materials at the end of each session. This action plan will help us to keep the flow of the future classes.” Having a lesson with a clear aim, specific tasks that aided its accomplishment, and an outcome that reflected its learning purpose, gives a clear perspective of what might happen or not, which is of great advantage to facilitators. It is the possibility to be one step ahead.

The experience of being able to reflect upon our teaching process has created awareness of our professional growth, since it demonstrates how different elements of the lessons can be improved according to what worked and what was a challenge for learners. This can be represented in the comments made by the practitioners at the end of each session, and then expanded through a critical reflection in the journal entries. At the end, we developed awareness that lesson plans not only guide the decisions to develop a proposal for action based on the needs and wants of learners, but also guide learners in a coherent way towards the expected learning outcome.

6.1.3.2 Challenges

When planning, it is of great importance to consider what students will be doing in the classroom, having the opportunity to balance the activities in our lessons with the purpose of

engaging and motivating the class are teaching actions shape the learning scenario. Harmer (2010) reminds us that “the balance of activities over a sequence of lessons is one of the features which will determine the overall level of student involvement in the course” (p. 318). However, finding this activity balance is a challenge in our context since we needed to provide a wide range of experiences to involve the different students’ learning styles and sustain attention. This can be evidenced in a journal entry, in which the practitioner reflected upon the challenge of keeping a smooth pacing throughout the sessions: “Planning the lessons is taking more time than we expected, because we are struggling with designing activities that allows smooth transitions between them...”

Adapting and creating different and significant activities that were aligned with the learning aims and appealing to students’ interests—while considering their different learning styles and proficiency level—was the main issue encountered when planning the lessons. Moreover, we learnt tht having a smooth transition between the different stages of the class (Presentation-Practice-Production) helped the lesson to flow effortlessly from one activity to the next and kept students engaged in the class. Finally, we discovered that it is not only important to gain learners’ attention, but to maintain it through a certain amount of mentally stimulating activities that engage a deeper level of curiosity and create awareness about how close they were to achieve the learning aim.

6.2 Student’s responses

In the following lines, we will describe the events related to students’ behaviors, including their reactions, attitudes, participation, and responses. These aspects are going to be expanded in two main items which are strengths and challenges.

6.2.1 Strengths

6.2.1.1 *Students responses to warm-ups*

Being able to analyze the different reactions of students during each stage of the classes led us to reflect upon which activities implemented went successful among learners. Velandia (2008) suggests that when planning our EFL classes, it is important to incorporate warming up activities that foster learners' motivation. Moreover, teachers need to raise students' positive attitudes towards learning while arousing learners' curiosity and involvement and to create an inviting image of the class so that they will get more engage with it and have a better learning process (Dornyei, 2001 as cited in Velandia, 2008.) Considering these suggestions, we decided to implement warm up activities for each session between five and 10 minutes each.

One of the activities implemented was to create a collaborative fairy tale, in which students had to start writing their own story in a piece of paper, then pass it to their elbow partner so they could keep adding content to it. This activity created some pressure on students to begin producing within a short amount of time; however, after getting used to the pace of the activity they started to feel more comfortable with it, as it was evidenced in one of the practitioners' observation, in which she noted: "Ss [Students] are eager to know what their classmates are adding to their stories. After T [teacher] gives the signal to pass the paper to their elbow partner, they ask who is adding to their story..." Another activity was One-upmanship, in which each student had to narrate an activity they realized while outdoing the one narrated by their last partner. The success of this activity is evidenced in the journal of the practitioner in charge of that session: "... the warm up of this session worked satisfactorily, as Ss [Students] were willingly participating by suggesting better activities than their peers, even if they were activities like going

to Miami or Disneyland, also they enjoyed the game as they were laughing at the suggestions made by their partners.”

The use of this type of warm up activities promoted students’ involvement during the presentation stage. Throughout this stage, some reading strategies were introduced in order to prepare students for the reading or practice stage. During the classes progression, the pre-service teachers noticed that the motivation transcended to an involvement in the stage because students were willingly making connections between what was being taught and what they already knew in their L1. This can be exemplified as one of the practitioners wrote on the observation: “... Ss [students] willingly share answers such as ‘una historia tiene inicio nudo y desenlace’.” Moreover, she also wrote “Ss [students] are attentive to T [teacher] explanation and make relations between what they already know and what they are learning.” As Mayer (2011) proposed motivation is an intrinsic attitude that initiates and stimulates the ongoing process of an individual to achieve objects. This idea is linked to the practice stage, in which students were motivated to apply what they learnt in the previous stage to carry out with the process of reading.

6.2.1.2 Students responses to the material

During the practice stage, which involves the while-reading activities, students were focus on the reading material. This was demonstrated throughout the implementations in which learners practiced their reading skill since they accomplished the activities proposed. Furthermore, they used tools in an autonomous way, such as the dictionary acquired on one of the previous sessions to aid their reading comprehension process. Besides, students reacted in a positive way regarding the material implemented since they were invested in observing the complete copy of the comic. This is denoted as the practitioners registered in a journal entry:

I feel relieved that students are reacting in a positive way in regards to the material chosen. They keep asking us about what's next on the story. Several times they have asked me if they can keep the complete copy of comic. At the end of the last session, one student asked us if he could find the whole story online. This interest towards the material was one of our main concerns before starting the implementation, the fact that it appeals to students' interests is one of the main factors of the development of this project.

6.2.1.3 Students responses to the creation of their own comics

On the last stage, students produced their own comic. During this process, learners were eager to draw their own comic based on the story plot they wrote, and the characters they designed on the previous sessions. On the sessions in which they worked on the creation of the comic, they were motivated not only to do their own comic, but also to openly share ideas with the purpose of helping others to create their own. Additionally, they were asking the pre-service teachers their opinions regarding the process of their comics to receive comments and approval. Moreover, learners maintained a constant work flow during the production stages of the implementations regardless of their grouping dynamics.

To conclude, the positive responses from students lead us to reflect upon the importance of using materials and activities that result in appealing to the learners. Their purpose was to motivate and engage them towards the development of the reading skill while making use of the different strategies acquired during the different stages of the lesson. Thus, making use of warm up activities that lower students' affective filter, prepares them to concentrate, and to begin thinking and focusing on the next stages of the class.

6.2.2 Challenges

Taking into account the reflections upon students' reactions, we encountered challenges regarding students' behavior. Throughout the implementations we encounter some issues related to grouping activities since some students did not like to work in pairs. Brown (2001) explains that group work is a technique in which two or more students are asked to complete a task where collaborative work is the key aspect to achieve the aim. Taking into account this theory, we designed strategies to promote students to work in pairs, so most of the activities proposed were developed in pairs or small groups. However, during the first implementation, students seemed averse to follow willingly the different grouping techniques practitioners proposed. Most of the time, they expressed their disagreement in the form of direct complains such as the ones registered in the observations and journal: "Today while I was providing material, one of the students told me that she didn't want to work with anyone she said, -¡No teacher a mi me gusta trabajar solita!" Moreover, in another journal entry this reflection was made: "The constant conflict between some of the class members is slowing down the development of some activities. I would like to ask the in-service teacher for some advice in how to successfully form balanced work groups."

Following the reflection made on the journal, we decided to ask the in-service teacher about the internal group dynamics. He provided specific advice regarding students' attitudes and personalities and regarding how to take advantage of these differences to group students in a way that benefited them at the moment of completing a task. The next step was to group students taking into account the recommendations made by the in-service teacher, which led to a shift in students' attitudes towards collaborative work. This was noted on a practitioner's observation entry:

After T [teacher] gave the instructions to the next activity, she informed Ss [students] they'll be carrying it out in pairs, some Ss expressed their discomfort through growls and sighs; however, they seem surprised when T explain she'll be forming the groups. This grouping exercise didn't take longer than 5 minutes, which is an improvement from the previous sessions...

As a conclusion, we came to the realization that behavior is an important factor in the development of a successful class. This challenge was overcome through the exploring the background of the group dynamics and using what we learnt to propose an action plan that helped the practitioners to have a better classroom management, creating a more relaxed learning environment that aided students to improve their approach towards the classes.

6.3 Linguistic outcomes

In this section, the results regarding the students' linguistic outcomes will be explored. This aims at reflecting upon specific items such as strengths and challenges related to students' production throughout the three stages of the class (presentation, practice, and production). Moreover, each item will be described and supported by evidence from the practitioners.

6.3.1 Strengths

This linguistic outcome derives from 10 implementations of using comics for the development of the reading skill in primary school students. In the following lines, we will describe the strengths from the students' linguistic productions. To begin with, and following the recommendations made by Afrilyasanti and Basthomi (2011), the methodology used to build reading comprehension among students, which works as a structured foundation for learners'

reading process, was the use of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading strategies, implementing one specific strategy in each of the sessions.

On the pre-reading stage, strategies for building vocabulary such as creating a glossary, which consists of a list with meaning of the words or phrases in the text that are difficult to understand, the use of keywords as a pre-teaching vocabulary through words and concepts of significance in the text, and the use of bilingual dictionary, were strategies implemented in order to facilitate the next stage of the reading process. On the third session, the use of a glossary strategy was introduced, the teacher provided learners with a list of nine words (insult, scab, beyond, provoke, dungeon, careful, place, shame, strain.). The students had to search for their meanings making use of bilingual dictionary. In this sense, providing students with a vocabulary set before starting to read, helped them to make connections in the while-reading stage.

On the second stage, the strategies used for enabling learners' disposition in regards to the texts were the use of context and images to make sense of the narrative, the use of transparent words (which are words that have a similar spelling and the same meaning in in both the target language and students' mother tongue). We found the use of transparent words as a strength in the reading skill because it gives the readers the chance of associating what they are learning in the target language to their L2. Finally, the use of dictionary was a complex strategy on the grounds that during the first implementations learners were reluctant to use any tool to aid their reading comprehension; however, after explaining the parts of a bilingual dictionary and how to use it, they showed willingly disposition to make use of it autonomously on the different tasks of each reading stage.

The third and last stage, the production stage, involved collecting data from students' process through the implementations. Summarizing, filling the gaps, and making a comic, were the strategies implemented for the post-reading. The effectiveness of implementing the writing of summaries was evidenced as students showed that they understood the basic story plot as they wrote paragraphs that coincided with the actual story line (Appendix E). Moreover, filling the gaps was an effective strategy since students were able to make connections between the information missing, and content of the comic to complete the activity (Appendix D). Finally, in the process of designing their own comic following a story plot, students demonstrated their skills to put into practice different elements learnt throughout the implementation sessions, such as the creation of an original character, the explanation of a narrative plot structure, the construction of an outline, and the production of the comic.

The acquisition of the elements mentioned above were part of a process in which they were gradually presented to the learners throughout the classes. During the first three sessions, students practice the creation of their own character; this was achieved through introducing them vocabulary related to physical and personality adjectives for description (Appendix F). This can be reflected on one of the practitioner's journal entry, in which she writes "...students were willingly sharing their characters drawings while talking about the characteristics they gave them. One of them expressed '¡Yo hice una bruja, pero es buena!', while other said 'Los míos son perritos.'..." The second element used by the learners in this process was the basic plot structure. One of the practitioners wrote on that class observation "T is explaining the plot structure of a narrative (introduction, rising actions, conflict, climax, falling actions, and conclusion). Meanwhile, Ss are making connection of this structure with their L1 background knowledge by saying out loud the name of the parts of a narrative plot structure in Spanish."

Furthermore, the third element applied was the creation of an outline. During this class, students activated their previous knowledge about plot structure and advanced in the creation of their own story. The achievement of this aim can be illustrated on the notes of the practitioner observing this class “One S [student] just came to me and show me his outline while narrating his story. He was well guided.” Last but not least, all these elements contributed to students in the creation of their own comic, which was the final product of the implementations. (Appendix H) From these examples, it can be demonstrated that students were able to identify the different elements of a plot structure such as the introduction, rising actions, the conflict, the climax, and the resolutions of a story. Additionally, they included other elements such as the main and secondary characters. They also used the comics templates, and the speech bubbles correctly. All these elements were part of the instructions we gave them throughout the implementations.

To conclude, students showed some progress on their linguistic outcomes of reading comprehension and writing skills during the last implementation. A proof of this linguistic progress is evidenced in their ability to use their own words to describe orally the events occurred within the story; as well as to summarize on written form what they comprehended from the comic’s scenes. Additionally, the linguistic outcome was strengthened by their ability to create their own comic.

6.3.2 Challenges

In words of Lopera (2008) teachers design tasks or activities to guide students to use helpful strategies when they read in a foreign language. In the pre-reading stage, the strategies used aimed at constructing background knowledge to help students make connections between what they already know (schemata) and what they are going to read. Celce-Murcia (1991) explain that

the while-reading strategies aim at helping students to understand specific content, making teachers take learners through the reading while they interact with the text. Finally, post-reading strategies intent to verify and expand the knowledge gained in the reading.

To begin with, we identified a challenge in the pre-reading stage related to locating key words in the comic since students did not have the level proficiency to achieve satisfactorily the tasks proposed in this stage. This can be demonstrated in one of the practitioner's observation as she wrote: "...T has to explain multiple times the concept of key words.". Moreover, this is also illustrated in the practitioner journal as she notes:

After explaining the concept of key words and exemplifying to them, students began working in identifying by themselves some of the keywords from the text.

However, their language level makes the task somehow more difficult to them from what we expected, since they don't have enough vocabulary to recognize empty words from key words. They also asked me several times after giving instructions what they had to do. In addition to the lack of language proficiency, students struggled understanding the meaning and use of the key words.

Next, on the while-reading stage we identified that some of the strategies implemented were not as successful as the others mentioned on the strengths above. Reading comprehension questionnaire was a task applied two times. The first time, students solved a multiple-choice questionnaire while they were reading the comic; however, only three students out of 29 answered all the questions correctly (Appendix I). For this reason, we decided to implement the same questionnaire the next class. This time, using the reading out loud strategy while explaining the difficult parts of the text. Students listened and followed the reading with their own material

and solved the same multiple-choice questionnaire. Surprisingly, none of the students were able to answer correctly the questions (Appendix J). From this experience, we decided not to apply this type of questionnaires to assess reading comprehension since it was demonstrated that it was not the appropriate type of tool for the students' level proficiency. Instead, we agreed on using other tools such as summarizing the content for assessing their reading comprehension process. Moreover, even though students were not using the target language for producing, they could link their knowledge about the story plot with their ability to explain it by using Spanish.

Finally, on the post-reading stage we encountered that even though students demonstrated their comprehension of what they read and the acquisition of different reading strategies through the activities proposed (filling the gaps, summarizing, and creating their own comic) their output was always in their L1. Nonetheless, we discovered that treating the L1 as a classroom resource creates new of convey meaning, and for students to use as part of their collaborative learning and of their individual strategy use. This can be reflected in the students' final production as they were able to create their own comic using the different elements learnt through the implementations (Appendix I).

In conclusion, this challenge leads us to understand that as teachers one of our roles was to adapt the activities and tasks to assess students' comprehension and facilitate their production. In addition, it created the opportunity to foster creativity at the moment of designing activities that take into account students' level proficiency and their interests, so they can achieve the different aims proposed for each session while feeling engaged on their learning process.

7. Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, the analysis of the results of teaching reading through comics will be considered. They were obtained during the 10 sessions implemented with primary school learners. This project aimed at developing learners' acquisition of the reading strategies to facilitate reading comprehension with the purpose of designing a personal comic with the correct plot structure. Moreover, this project attempted to teach reading strategies following the format of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities, to assess students reading comprehension process through tasks, and to collect their final product and portfolios.

First, over the 10 implementations students were exposed to reading strategies such as the creation of a glossary, the use of a bilingual dictionary, and the identification of transparent words and key words. These strategies were taught following the PPP Methodology, which created a suitable process for developing awareness about each strategy by giving the learners the space to activate the strategy, practice it in a controlled environment, and finally to apply it through a series of meaningful activities (multiple choice questionnaires, fill the gaps, and summarizing) that allow students the opportunity to use them in their individual reading process. During students' learning process, it was found that they could engage with the main material used which was the Adventure Time comic titled 'Marceline gone Adrift' as was demonstrated by positive responses like enthusiasm towards the comic and the motivation to read it. Likewise, students demonstrated the acquisition of these reading comprehension strategies by being able to summarize the events of the story and to fill the information missing in the course in the practice stage. Finally, they were capable of producing their own story on the format of a comic book, showing their understanding of the elements from a basic narrative plot structure.

Second, the next result refers to the teaching objective related to the pre-service teachers. Teaching is part of an outgoing process in which we must reflect upon to what extent learners have reached the learning objectives. Throughout the implementations, assessing was one of the main activities of teachers, which lead us to grade, report, and coach students' performance. The tasks proposed by the teachers were a tool to engage students on their reading process, allowing them to practice, reflect or improve academically. In addition, another role of teachers was to collect students' final products. This course of action leads us to create the habit of implementing an assessment activity for each session, giving us the chance of continuously adding content to each learner portfolio. As a result, all these procedures helped us to reach the teaching objective successfully since it provided enough resources to gather the information necessary to draw clear results.

Third, at the end of the implementations we came to the conclusion that teaching reading through comics presented challenges regarding students' behaviors related to grouping techniques. We had to overcome this challenges in order to have positive results by designing strategies that allowed us to plan activities in which students felt comfortable doing collaborative work. Besides, since keeping controlled classroom environment was a key aspect to accomplish the aim established for each session, it was necessary to look up for strategies to maintain students' attention during the class. We found out that using attention grabbers as a strategy to maintain students engaged was successful because it kept students focused and ready to learn.

It also led us to reflect upon the importance of the material designed for the sessions and the type of tasks applied since these are key factors to engage learners on the lessons with the purpose of obtaining satisfactory results. This means that in order to maintain students engaged

during the implementations, it is essential to design material and meaningful activities that motivate them and appeal to their interests. At the same time, teachers must take into account students' language proficiency, so they can guarantee learners a chance to be exposed to the target language inside the limits of their abilities. Additionally, the use of a bilingual dictionary was an important tool since it gave learners the opportunity to make connections between their L1 and their target language while facilitating the comprehension of the story comic plot, as well as enriching their English vocabulary.

Last, the next steps for further projects must be focused on how to design the materials and activities, based on the target population that is going to be addressed during the implementations. This way, the pre-service teachers will obtain the expected results in regards to the development of the reading skill. This information can be gathered through a needs analysis (survey or interview) that evidences students' interests, language proficiency, among others.

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